

Library Notes

Thanks to those who helped with this issue. Also to the readers who have sent kind words, donations, or both. We are putting various scans up on the website; we've had to make some new subject headings to help you find them. See:

Books and pamphlets (digitised)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/bzkjs6>

Ephemera and other treasures (digitised)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/9320sp>

Periodicals (digitised)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/tht98z>

There are also some translations of biographies of people from the Spanish Revolution at:

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/kd538q> taken from *Biografías del '36* edited by Paolo Casciola and Agustín Guillamón.

'The Involvement of Spanish Libertarian Women in the French Resistance' and 'Unknown and Essential. Forgers and the Libertarian Underground' by Imanol are also new, see:

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wwq18c>

Feedback welcome. ■

Join the Professionals: The army of the unemployed

As the unemployment figures zoom ever upwards in the North West, the army has been having a field day with their recruiting. Manchester has proved to be very good indeed for these vultures who were boasting in the columns of the Evening News of their success.

However, there is another side to the coin, since the Irish troubles started there have been 780 who deserted, 1350 who bought themselves out and 4,900 Court Martials. No doubt all this accounts for the State's attitude to the BWNIC's [British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign] leaflet 'Some information for discontented soldiers' and to recent arrests at the show in Platt Fields Park Manchester, where the army were putting on a display. Six members of the Liberation theatre group were arrested and charged with insulting words and behaviour. Bail was refused, and when the group appeared in court the police asked that their finger prints should be taken. The prosecution demanded a remand in custody until 29th. July. It was reported in court that a report would be sent to the D.P.P. [Director of Public Prosecutions] suggesting a charge under the 1934 Incitement to Disaffection Act. The penalty is up to 2 years in jail, or life if conspiracy is added. It is thought that the Police will wait until after the trial of the BWNIC 14 in September, to bring the further charge of incitement.

Many young men may feel that life in the Army would be preferable to life on the dole. The adverts

stress the money to be earned and the adventures to be had. With unemployment standing at 1,250,000 the temptation must be very great if you've just left school with no prospect of a job: You can see all the desirable things to be had if you've got the money: motorbikes, stereos, clothes, entertainment.

Most other countries in the Common Market have conscription, which Britain has now discontinued, and therefore relies on a volunteer Army. This consequently makes the State extremely sensitive to interference with their recruiting programme. However, most of the anti-militarist propaganda tends to the academic or moralistic, missing any real appeal to working class youth.

The basis of any anti-military campaign must be that of approaching young, who make up the cannon fodder of the Army, on the terms of their everyday lives. We have to give a meaningful answer to their demand for adventure, and a wage that's more than the pittance of the dole.

This type of campaign would concentrate on the positive wants of the unemployed. It would be a campaign that highlighted such items of news as that of the ill-treatment of young soldiers at Brassington Camp, in Cambridgeshire. Trainees were punched and kicked by N.C.O.s. A soldier who collapsed while carrying a 56lbs pack on a route march was denied a drink of water. Others were tipped from their beds, and then punched for not having them made up.

A soldier may get good pay, but he's on call 24 hours a day. His time is never his own, he's subject to Army authority at all times. What appears to be a good wage for 8 hours work is not so good for 24.

As for the adventure, it's not all sandy, palm covered beaches, yachts in summer and a bit of skiing in the winter. The British Army's trips abroad aren't usually to the holiday resorts. Belfast isn't number one at the travel agents, and it's not because of the high rainfall. The Army doesn't exist to do you a favour, it's a force of repression, not a holiday club. The discipline of the Army is there to make you more afraid of the officers and the N.C.O.s than the enemy (whoever they are at the time). However it is not for us to moralise, there is no Recruiting Sergeant better than unemployment.

However, the way forward is to relate the soldiers' situation to that of the class struggle.

Direct Action [Syndicalist Workers Federation] No.9 [1975] <https://libcom.org/article/direct-action-swf-09-1975>

[See Report in *Peace News* about the not guilty verdicts on the BWNIC 14 (December 1975): <https://peacenews.info/node/8240/40-years-ago-expensive-production-big-flop> and from Past Tense <https://pasttenseblog.wordpress.com/2016/12/10/today-in-military-history-14-pacifists-acquitted-of-incitement-to-disaffect-soldiers-1975/>] ■



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£1 or two dollars

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'Our Cause May Grow The Richer,' Some thoughts on Billy MacQueen

Anarchist newspapers can flatter to deceive for the researcher in anarchist history. They often shed a light on some of what is happening at a certain time and in a certain place. They provide windows into areas of anarchist history and fill in some of the rather daunting gaps that come with the territory, but it would be foolhardy for us to insist that the study of anarchist print culture of a certain period is a full and realistic picture of anarchists and anarchist activity during that time. A good example of this would be the newspaper *War Commentary* (November 1939-June 1945). The general reader looking at the paper's anti-war articles, pages of anarchist and radical history, and comments on current affairs would be in ignorance of the bitterness existing within the ranks of the Anarchist Federation of Britain during the period of the paper's publication. Not one mention was made of this tension within the pages of *War Commentary*. When the split occurred in January 1945, a split that fractured, and then created the landscape of British anarchism for the next fifty years, it came as a shock to many.

I want to look at the life of William (Billy or Mac) MacQueen, 1875-1908 and see what his scattered writings and publications tell us about him and the anarchist world he was part of. Just as importantly I want to see what they don't tell us.[1]

The Free Commune

The Free Commune newspapers and leaflets were put together by William MacQueen and Alf Barton (1868-1933).[2] The pair knew each other well and had spoken together as early as September 1893 at a meeting organized by Leicester Anarchist Communists to protest the use of police violence against striking colliers. Interestingly MacQueen was representing London painters. The first two issues of the paper were published in Manchester (April 1898 and June 1898) while the third (October 1898) was based in Leeds. MacQueen and Barton also had the help of Tom Jones, a Manchester anarchist who appears to have dropped out of the project after the second issue.

The three editions of *The Free Commune* were produced on thin paper with only the second paper reaching the lofty height of six pages. The others were only four pages long. According to John Quail in *The Slow Burning Fuse* they were produced at a time when

the English movement was in decline and if we judge the health of a movement by the production of newspapers then he was correct. *Liberty*, *The Torch* and *Alarm* (all based in London) had all ceased publication in the immediate years before *The Free Commune* appeared and only *Freedom* carried on under the capable editorship of Alfred Marsh. That said we must remember that at this time there were anarchists doing things or at the very least thinking about their experiences as anarchists and assessing what next moves were necessary to bring about revolution. We should see the creation of *The Free Commune* as part of that experience. Both Barton and MacQueen had been active in the anarchist movement for some time before the appearance of the first issue. Barton, as a member of the Manchester anarchists, had played a prominent part in the free speech fight there and in 1892 had spoken at a large meeting in support of the Walsall anarchists. In 1895 he had authored a piece on 'Anarchism' for that year's *Labour Annual*. MacQueen meanwhile had a reputation as a good outdoor speaker on anarchism in both Burnley and Leeds and worked hard for the cause. The work of these two anarchists then was local, based away from London and all too easily overlooked. Because we can't see the fires doesn't mean there wasn't quite a bit of smoldering to catch our eye if we look in the right places.

Although both MacQueen and Barton were class struggle anarchist communists, editions of *The Free Commune* suggest that they both saw anarchism as a rich tapestry and were easily able to reconcile what some of us may now see as contradictions or antagonisms within the concept. The first issue of the paper, for example, adopts an 'Anarchist or Free Socialist position' in its opening statement and yet, the paper also claimed to be 'Free-lance in the realm of thought'. Barton writes a long piece on 'Thoughts' where he emphasizes that 'the individual, each individual mind is the center of things'. The editors in a small piece suggest that there is a battle between the exploiters and the oppressed which may well be imminent. Sadly, *The Free Commune* offers little local evidence of that upcoming battle. There is mention of the creation of a co-operative electrical and bicycle workshop in Leeds as well as a report of some of the Northern Co-operative Societies visiting the anarchist

inspired Clousden Hill Colony on Tyneside as part of their conference in Sunderland. There were also advertisements for two papers, the London based *Freedom*, together with some of their pamphlets and the San Francisco based anarchist-communist *Free Society*. Readers could take a subscription out for this, *Les Temps Nouveaux* and other Continental papers from the Free Commune Office in Manchester. All communications should be sent to MacQueen. At the very least we can see they were trying to establish the newspaper within the international world of anarchist newspapers.

There is an earnestness there but, if truth be told, little else. It is a fishing expedition to see if there are other likeminded people still active who wish to regenerate the movement of a few years ago. The feedback they received presumably encouraged the editors to continue.

Six pages long, the second issue of *The Free Commune* in June 1896 featured news of more anarchist activity with adverts and mentions of groups in Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Derby and the Sheffield Free Communist Group as well as a list of subscribers to the paper. There is also an advertisement for the Leicester Socialist League. For the first time MacQueen writes for the paper, a small article on Co-operation, arguing for the need to establish colonies near towns and stating his disagreement with the ‘orthodox’ militants who believe this approach withdraws energy from the masses. On the contrary he argues, ‘Everything that purifies life helps the Revolution’. It is a telling phrase redolent with the period they are living in and their sense of what is possible. For example, the paper stresses the importance of the Brotherhood Church movement based on Tolstoyan lines, advertising their paper *New Order*[3] and the bicycle workshop in Leeds mentioned in No. 1, now called The Brotherhood Workshop and run on anarchist communist line, while at the same time portraying the Milan food riots and subsequent Bava Beccaris massacre as the ‘preliminary battle of the Revolution’.[4] Anything that moves us nearer to the Revolution, from bicycle workshops to riots, has to be supported. That urgency would characterize MacQueen and his work over the next few years.

The same eclectic approach to revolution is seen in the third issue of *The Free Commune* dated October 1898. The paper is now published in Leeds with Barton in Manchester and MacQueen in Leeds still looking after the arrangements. It includes a long article on Nietzsche by Barton, describing Nietzsche as a profound thinker, gifted writer and inspired prophet. Barton cautions against what he sees as Nietzsche’s ‘great contempt for the multitude’ and but sees the critical importance of Nietzsche as the smasher ‘of old idols’. There is also a telling comment on the assassination of the Austrian Empress Elisabeth by the Italian anarchist Luigi

Luccheni, which had occurred the previous month on 10 September in Geneva. The editors are neither in favor nor opposed to the act but would like to see similar outrage every time a working woman is killed by the profit-mongering system. The issue also includes a small donors list and a notice announcing plans to produce a ‘small quarterly magazine devoted to libertarian thought.’ No further explanation is offered. Was it because they were too busy to put out a regular paper? Perhaps there was more political activity they were taking part in, or they simply felt they could get their ideas over more effectively in a longer quarterly magazine?

Whatever the reason or reasons *The Free Commune: A Quarterly Magazine of Libertarian Thought* published by The Leeds Free Commune Group appeared in 1899 and was dated January, February and March of that year. It is certainly bulkier than the paper, but the quarterly lacked the current news and commentary that had informed the newspaper, a constant problem for magazines like this where contemporary news can quickly become out of date by the time the magazine is published. Consequently, there is even more concentration on theory than anarchist activity.[5] For the purposes of this piece I want to look at MacQueen’s article on ‘Property’, which is an all-out attack on individual property ownership: ‘marked by tyranny and oppression’. For MacQueen individual property ownership is responsible for the power of religion and represents the individuality of the strong man, the chief. Property rights have been marked by ‘a trail of human woe’, you own property at the expense of someone else and the solution is to ‘throw open the path of production to free and voluntary associations on communist lines’. The progress of humanity is hindered by the existence of individual property. MacQueen’s article allows for no compromise whatsoever and appears to be indicative of a firmly held position based on reading and thinking as well as, perhaps, lived experience

‘All hell was let loose’

The Second Boer War began on 11 October 1899 and for some anarchists all hell was let loose. Many supported the Boers in the struggle seeing the war as another example of brutal British imperialism. MacQueen had written an occasional piece on the state of the anarchist movement in the North and Midlands of Britain for *Freedom* and the January-February issue of the paper contains his article ‘Some Northern Notes’. He writes that the anarchists in Leeds held a mass demonstration against the war organized by MacQueen and others on 1 October 1899 and that MacQueen himself had given a talk on ‘Communism and Anarchism’ in the manufacturing and colliery village of Thornhill Lea near Dewsbury. There is obviously a lot going on and one can imagine how anti-war activity and propaganda must

belongings and proceed to the exit where large quantities of police awaited them. The steam coming from the Inspector’s ears warned the anarchists what was to come. ‘I’m In Charge Now’ he cried, and went on to announce that the group would be handcuffed in pairs, taken to the local station and charged with breach of the peace and criminal damage.

Thereafter, the 12 were subjected to the usual indignities: photographed, finger-printed, given a body-search and locked in single cells for the night. No violence was used but it was particularly hard for those 9 members of the group who were vegans and had nothing but bread and water for 24 hours.

Next day, they were packed six to a cell (5' x 10') and later appeared at the Sheriff Court. There they pled not guilty to all charges and were released on bail. Trial was fixed for 10th December.

In retrospect, the group felt that the action was relatively successful – not from the narrow view of publicity for the Clydeside Anarchists – but because it was a positive action on behalf of the miners to the ruling class offensive. The negative aspect lies in the anarchists having to do the job at all. The impotent and ossified Trade Union seems incapable of anything but a negative reaction to the boss class.

Social democracy and the bureaucratized TU movement have disarmed the working class. Lullabies of class peace, parliamentary and legal paths to social harmony have virtually paralysed the proletariat’s instinct for self-defence.

The group hopes that the action has helped to forge closer links between Clydeside Anarchists and the miners for whom they have campaigned and collected more than £2,000. Perhaps it will galvanise more workers into direct action and show them that defence against the boss is not confined within the narrow limits of branch resolutions and letters to MPs and councillors. At the very least, Clydeside Anarchists have given the lie to those who charge that we couldn’t organise a booze-up in a brewery. Price Waterhouse can testify to that.

Brian Biggins

Glasgow, 13th September, 1984

<https://libcom.org/history/day-we-took-white-tower>
Original held in the Spirit of Revolt Archive, John Cooper Collection <https://spiritofrevolt.info/john-cooper-finding-collection/> ■

Papers and Projects

Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo Following their fundraiser the FAL are now putting digitised documents (primarily but not all in Spanish) at <https://issuu.com/fundacionanselmolorenzo>

Marie Goldsmith ‘Marie Goldsmith: Scientific Luminary, Anarchist Militant’ by Søren Hough, was published in the latest issue of *Black Flag Anarchist Review*, (July 14, 2023). Available with writings by

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Goldsmith at <https://mariegoldsmith.uk/archives/>
Past Tense the comrades have two new publications out: *Rare Doings at Camberwell* (‘A wild ramble through the murky past of London SE5’) and *St John’s Eve* (‘partying, drinking, ecstatic dancing’) <https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/PastTenseHistories> or <https://pasttensehistories.bigcartel.com>

Stuart Christie The Tyneside Anarchist Archive have posted a wonderful interview with Stuart from *Bristle* magazine (Summer 2006). ‘I know that there is nothing more off-putting than self-righteous ideologically driven proselytising, be it on the page, screen or public platform. People need to relate to you on the page as a human being, with all of humanity’s foibles, failings and uncertainties as well as describing those moments when you do something unexpected – taking the road less travelled as it were. But humour – be it slapstick, ironic or gallows, is by far the best page-turner, for me at any rate.’

<https://tynesideanarchistarchive.wordpress.com/2023/07/01/stuart-christie-interview-2006/>

Yiddish anarchist papers *Der Arbayter Fraynd* [*The Worker’s Friend*] (Page images from issues 1903-1904):

<http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/browse/#view=ViewFolder¶m=Workers%20Friend>

Frayhayts Shtime [*The Voice of Freedom*] a copy from 1921 which survived to be included in the Oyneg Shabes archive in the Warsaw Ghetto:

<https://cbj.jhi.pl/documents/958275/0/>

Libcom have just completed their online run of *World Labour News* from 1960-62.

<https://libcom.org/article/world-labour-news-1960s>
(*Direct Action* from the SWF and *Black Flag* are also getting worked on).

Cleveland donate to Healthcare for Peter Gelderloos (and support for other Cleveland organizers)

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-peter-kaniku-other-cleveland-organizers>

MayDay Rooms is an ‘archive, resource and safe haven for social movements, experimental and marginal cultures and their histories.’ It’s also home to the Stuart Christie Memorial Archive. They are having a funding drive:

<https://maydayrooms.org/mayday-mayday-funding-drive/>

Police Spies Out of Lives ‘The women who were spied on welcome the [Undercover Policing] Inquiry’s findings, which show the undercover unit was “unjustified and undemocratic”. They now demand the Met hand over the files gathered on them, and urge the Inquiry to “stop protecting police” and reveal the full identities of all undercover officers.’ <https://policespiesoutoflives.org.uk/interim-inquiry-our-press-release/>

The Salish Sea Anarchist Archive They have four issues of *Discontent* (1898, scanned by the IISG in Amsterdam) on Archive.org:

<https://archive.org/details/discontent-vol-1-no-1> ■

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commit legalised robbery seemed to all Clydeside Anarchists an invitation to more adventurous tactics by the boss class.

By 8.30 am, a senior officer was knocking at the door seeking to parley. He was told: 1) That his minions has threatened violence (true); 2) that all anarchists had been medically examined and photographed the previous day (not quite true); 3) that they had nothing more to say to him and that he should fetch a representative of Price Shithouse to consider some important questions.

At 9 am, a Mr. Campbell arrived. He said he was a Partner and senior executive of the company in Scotland and that he and the staff (30) were seriously put out by the occupation and were anxious to come in and start work. He was informed that the Welsh miners and their families were being even more seriously inconvenienced by the actions of PW. Two conditions were put to Campbell for the evacuation of the building: 1) That the funds of the South Wales Miners be restored to them; 2) that PW undertake no further sequestrations. Campbell said it would take a little time to get a response from the Head Office in Birmingham. The occupants promised to be patient.

An hour later (10 am) Campbell slipped a typed letter over the steel door. In it he acknowledged the anarchist action but replied negatively to both points. However, the note went on to say that if the South Wales Miners would identify those funds which were ear-marked for clothing and food-relief, PW would release them. Campbell was told to wait half-an-hour while a meeting was held to consider the letter. He was reminded by one of the group that there was a lot of valuable equipment in the offices and that any violent action could inadvertently result in an awful lot of damage. (The suite of offices contained about 18 rooms – the entire floor – and was ultra-modern. There were no manual typewriters, only a few IBM golf ball typewriters. But the place was stuffed with terminals, VDUs, word processors, telex machines, photocopiers, etc. – certainly £100,000 worth of equipment. The really valuable stuff, however, was the Diskettes; mini discs containing all the files plus work in progress. About 900 of these were lying around all capable of storing 10,000 words. However, the threat was an empty one as the group had decided not to cause any malicious damage. Nevertheless, it seemed to give Campbell some cause to stay the hand of the gendarmes.)

By this time the building was surrounded by the guardians of law and order. Two 60-foot banners were stretched round the 13th floor reading: GLASGOW BACKS THE MINERS and UNEMPLOYED SOLIDARITY. Electricity had been cut-off, several phones were out and large numbers of police occupied the corridors.

At 10.45 am Campbell was informed that the meeting had considered his letter and would investigate the authenticity of this claim about their

willingness to release identified funds.

The next several hours were spent in talks with the South Wales Miners' headquarters and to PW's Man Outside The Door. This period was afforded many opportunities to go through extensive filing system. It was a real eye-opener. This multi-million pound outfit has accountancy as only a small part of its business. It concentrates on handling take-over bids, forecasting money market trends, overseas investments, etc. It was clear that a big percentage of the big monopolies are clients of PW.

Dinner was served at around 12 but almost all resisted the temptation of PW's extensive cellar (Barsac '79, not a great year, but ...) Leaflets were scattered at 5 minute intervals. Supporters were gathering in the streets below and press and news agencies contacted about the occupation and the reasons for it. The South Wales NUM said it was being reported locally and were delighted by the action. Meanwhile, the cops were bored and were boring! Stealthily, they were trying to gain access through the fire door; but it hadn't simply been nailed up – it was the subject of a superb piece of civil engineering by Castlemilk Constructors (unemployed). The boys in blue were disappointed.

The discussions with the South Wales NUM revealed that they were not prepared to identify those funds which were for the relief of hardship. They claimed that to do so would be to recognise the Courts which was contrary to union policy and in conflict with the Wembley Conference decisions which had been reinforced by the Brighton TUC the previous day. One of the team, Enrico (Malatesta?) in speaking to Emlyn Jenkins (SWNUM) observed that they would prefer not to recognise any court. However, the anarchists did not see the task [as] making demands of the miners but of exposing the scab outfit of Price Waterhouse.

Certainly some publicity was being gained: radio, TV and newspapers were carrying reports of the action and giving garbled accounts of the reasons for it. Leaflets were being distributed at job centres and DSS offices but sympathisers were being warned-off by cops from giving out material near the occupation.

As the afternoon progressed several things became clear: 1) It was not possible to force PW into restoring the miners' funds; 2) the cops were becoming increasingly restive and seemed likely to indulge in heroics; 3) one of the doors was less secure than the others and seemed vulnerable to a determined assault. Considering these factors it was decided to dismantle the barricades. Campbell of PW conceded that if no malicious damage had been done then charges would not be brought against the occupying anarchist force. There were serious doubts about this.

At 4.15 pm, having removed most barricades, the police were allowed to enter by one door. The 12 militants were invited to collect their tools and

have taken up so much time in the lives of some anarchists. Some of this time would have been spent in small organizing meetings, as well as the more public and grand settings such as the meeting that MacQueen helped organize for Emma Goldman in Leeds in December that year. It certainly wasn't easy sailing being an anarchist at a time of massive patriotic feeling. A report by MacQueen in the September-October 1900 edition of *Freedom*, 'A Few Bits of Propaganda' noted that an anti-war event in Leeds had turned violent as it was attacked by supporters of the War. What MacQueen's laconic account omits is that he was badly beaten by the mob and nearly lynched.

MacQueen's views on how anarchists could bring about the Revolution became more focused as the War carried on. He became a firm adherent of the need for anarchists to create anarchist organizations, a view apparently gaining traction among his immediate comrades, presumably in meetings and private discussions and the annual picnic and conference of the Midland Anarchists which took place in August 1900, in Monsal Dale. From this rain-affected event came the *Anarchist Newsletter* of 31st August 1900, subtitled 'A Means of communication between the comrades in England'. [6]

MacQueen explained in the introduction that the *Newsletter* grew out of the Conference. Anarchists in attendance felt that there was a lack of both working together and common action. Opportunities had been missed in this time of reaction and this paper would be a means of bringing comrades together and letting everyone know what is happening throughout the region. Barton provides a full report on the Conference and MacQueen's final piece stresses 'This is why we appear to bring the movement together, to check and discuss as at any firesides, in order that our cause may grow the richer, that we may be able to fight the harder for the REVOLUTION'.

Times appeared to be changing. It was no longer a matter of a few anarchists putting out newspaper feelers but now the production of a newsletter that reflects a movement and a newsletter that, even in a time of intense patriotic reaction, has its eyes fixed on the revolutionary prize through anarchist organization.

Meanwhile MacQueen continued to be busy. The small and rather unheralded pamphlet *Anarchism* by C.M. Wilson had been published by the Free Commune Anarchist Group (Leeds) in 1900. Described on the cover as Free Commune Pamphlets No. 1, it was reprinted from Fabian Tract No. 4 and is an attempt to explain to the uninitiated just what anarchism is, and what it is not. MacQueen was also working beyond Leeds. A brief note by him in the Jan-Feb 1900 *Freedom* tells of a meeting organized on 29 November 1899, to revive the anarchist

movement in Hull. He reckoned there were at least fifty anarchists there and a significant number of them were German speakers. MacQueen also appears to have had some proficiency in the language. To this end the July 1901 *Freedom* mentions the publication, in German, of Johann Most's pamphlet *Die Gottespest* (The Deistic Pestilence). It was also a Free Commune pamphlet, and it offers an indication of the direction MacQueen's anarchism was taking him. It was also confirmation of his staunch atheism which had surfaced in his earlier essay on Property. 1901 also saw him publish Kropotkin's *The Development of Trade Unionism* and another German language pamphlet by Most, *Kommunistischer Anarchismus*, (Anarchist Communism) the latter being printed and published by MacQueen in Leeds. The two German pamphlets were presumably initially aimed at the German movement in Hull with *Die Gottespest* being published by the Free Commune Press in Hull.

'A sudden and dramatic change'

Things appeared to be motoring along nicely when there was a sudden and dramatic change in MacQueen's life. He left Leeds and England altogether sometime in late 1901 or early 1902. By February of 1902 he was speaking at a German anarchist meeting in New York City. There is some uncertainty as to why MacQueen left England. He may have lost his job but this doesn't entirely explain the move to America. The move may have happened due to his contact with German anarchists in New York. This is plausible as MacQueen began working with Most and his supporters immediately on his arrival. The early speaking engagement suggests he was certainly known in that milieu, he had, after all, published two of Most's pamphlets. What we can say with certainty is that MacQueen entered a world of militancy and social tension that would test him like never before. It was a world he would embrace with his usual courage and enthusiasm. If there was a challenge to face he tended to run towards it and challenges there would be aplenty.

President William McKinley had been shot by Leon Czolgosz (who identified himself as an anarchist) on 6 September 1901 in Buffalo and died from his wounds days later. Czolgosz's action had led to a fierce wave of anti-anarchist sentiment in the US. Several prominent anarchists had been arrested and some criminal anarchy acts were passed, including one in New York in 1902. Anarchist newspapers were also suppressed, some permanently. Emma Goldman in particular had been targeted by the press as Czolgosz had attended one of her meetings in Cleveland on 3 May 1901.

On 7 September 1901 *Freiheit* the German anarchist newspaper edited by Johann Most published an old article by Karl Heinzen called 'Murder Against Murder' which praised tyrannicide.

Ironically Most had used it as a space filler as he was short of copy and the issue was probably already printing when McKinley was shot. But quickly Most was arrested and on 14 October 1901 he was convicted for printing ‘Murder Against Murder’ and sentenced to a years imprisonment. He was released pending appeal on the 29th of October, the same day as the execution of Czolgosz. Most was due to be arrested and attend his appeal hearing on 5 May, which he would go on to lose. The day before, (May 4) there was a large meeting of around 5,000 Most supporters at the New Irving Hall in New York. The meeting was crackling with anger and tension. MacQueen was a speaker at the meeting and was described by the *New York Times* (5 May 1902) as holding the meeting spell-bound with his attack on the government. ‘The laws of the American Government are rotten to the core’ was just one of the incendiary claims he is alleged to have made. Anger seethed and broke out regularly leading to armed detectives moving into the meeting and, after some struggles, arresting both MacQueen and Most. If nothing else this meeting allows us to sense how close MacQueen had become to Most, MacQueen’s considerable abilities as a speaker and, as the rallies against the Boer War had intimated, MacQueen’s refusal to back down when challenged.

The *New York Times* article also describes MacQueen as editor of *Liberty* a weekly workman’s paper based at 60 Gold Street, New York. He hadn’t wasted any time in joining the fray! *Liberty* ran from April 1902-March 1903 and MacQueen is named as the editor of the paper until December 1902. Its prospectus is clear and forthright: ‘*Liberty* advocates an unceasing war against Capitalism and Governmentalism by any and every means’. Vol 1. No 11 found MacQueen sympathizing with Czolgosz, arguing ‘Our respect for you, Leon, is only equaled by our detestation of the Irish American Boodle hunting vulture over who’s grave so many crocodile tears are shed’.

You can feel the anger and resentment in MacQueen’s words and how his words reflect the mood of his comrades and friends. This paper isn’t putting out feelers for interest, it isn’t reflecting a new organization either. Rather it is projecting the emotions and moods that MacQueen is meeting every day. Could it be that the Revolution he longed for was near? Was there something in the countless round of meetings, conversations, and socials that made him think so? We may never know with certainty what was said at those venues. What we can see is their effect on MacQueen the writer. Things weren’t smoldering anymore, rather there were fires seemingly everywhere wherever you looked and MacQueen played a significant part in stoking them. He spoke at countless meetings – many of them union meetings and was often cheered and occasionally attacked!!!

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The Paterson strike

In April 1902 a strike broke out amongst the dyers in the silkworks of Paterson, New Jersey. The silk workers were from a variety of nationalities – including French, Italian, German, and English speakers. Paterson had a noticeable Italian anarchist presence and was the home of the important Italian language anarchist paper *La Questione Sociale* edited, at this time, by Luigi Galleani. MacQueen contributed to the English language section of the paper as did Emma Goldman. On 18 June a rally was held in support of the strikers where MacQueen spoke alongside Galleani. After the rally up to two thousand strikers and their supporters marched into Paterson leading to street battles with police that lasted for hours. Warrants were quickly issued for the arrest of MacQueen, Rudolf Grossman and Luigi Galleani, on charges of inciting to riot and malicious mischief. Grossman didn’t speak at the meeting but it is clear that the authorities saw outside anarchist militants as a threat that had to be crushed. Galleani fled to Canada and was sentenced in absentia while Grossman and MacQueen were sentenced to three years imprisonment for sedition and two for malicious mischief. They were released on bail pending appeal.

From here on the arc of MacQueen’s life becomes a little less clear. We know that MacQueen’s wife Nellie, who was Alfred Barton’s sister, and their children were refused entry in the USA as undesirables and had to return to the UK on 3 January 1903. Grossman had already jumped bail and left the USA and MacQueen would soon follow him, jumping his own bail and returning to the UK in order, one senses to be with his family and avoid imprisonment. He would find safety there. Dates are a little blurry for when he returned to England[7] but it is noticeable that some publishing activity that he may have been involved in took place in Leeds and Hull in 1903 and early 1904.

In 1904 Free Commune Press Hull published *Die Verbrachen Gottes* (The Crimes of God) by Sebastien Faure which continued the trend of militant atheism set by *Die Gottespest*. Earlier, in October 1903 the Free Commune Press in Leeds published an extract from Kropotkin’s ‘The Spirit of Revolt’ The latter’s commitment to unceasing action ‘sometimes good natured, sometimes terrible’ and its stress on an agitation that ‘is dictated by circumstances, means and temperament’ can be mirrored both in *The Free Commune* and MacQueen’s experiences in Paterson. For a few brief weeks there the Spirit of Revolt had surfaced. Men and women had broken free from the exhaustion and exploitation of work and together had sensed something better. The strike was defeated by July 1902, but the memory remained.

Then something totally surprising happened again! On 11 April 1904 the *New York Times* notes that MacQueen was back in New York having arrived

soul’s the cleanest,
For the man who exploits his brother man, of all
useless men is the meanest.
Is the miner a man... or a mole, that tunnels deep
down in the earth?
Blind as a mole, is he, to all that makes life’s worth?
Is his heart as black as his face? Is his life his own, or
yours,
Ye men who in sloth grow fat on the coal, that he
hews, as his sweat downpours?
What is it makes life’s worth; to possess what
another man MADE.

And lest one day the robbed should rise in their
wrath, to go forever afraid?
Or scorning the ease that’s bought at the cost of
another’s pain,
To take one’s share in the work of the world, with
labour of own hand and brain?
What is it makes a man; fine clothes upon the back,
Soft hands and a heart so hard it can let a brother
lack?
Your hands may be hard, but your hearts are soft, and
full of courage, and true,
To feel and fight for a brother’s wrong, and stand up
for your own rights too.
If courage makes man, then of all men the miner is
one of the best,
Was there ever a one of you failed a mate when put
to the test?

“Never mind for me, I’m done, lad, there’s others
further on,”
And you’d risk your lives to save them though the
chance were a hundred to one.

I have asked, are you blind as moles? ... Aye, so long
as you do not see
The mockery of a “living wage”, – man only LIVES
when he’s free!

Who gave the earth unto the few, to hold in greedy
gripe?
Plain Robbery, upheld by Law;... REVOLT, the time
is ripe!

Why ask for just a little more of that which is your
own?
Who gets the coal, who grows the corn, ’tis his and
his alone
To share with ALL who share his toil, and NONE for
those who shirk;
No need for money then to buy the fruits of our own
work.

Earth’s storehouse plenty holds for all, labour its only
key,
Away with masters, one and all,... and, workers,
we’ll be Free!

Janet Grove.
Sept. 29, 1925.
From *The Anarchist*: published by the Hammersmith
Anarchist Group 1935

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Albert Meltzer mentioned her in *The Anarchists In London 1935-1955* ‘Janet Grove (resident in the Forest of Dean, and particularly active in the cause of the gypsies) often came up to give a hand at meetings’ (in support of the Spanish Revolution). ■

The day we took the white tower [Price Waterhouse occupation, Glasgow, 1984]

At 7:30 am on Tuesday, 4th September, 1984, 12 anarchists stormed a multi-story office block in Glasgow city centre. They went in to occupy the headquarters of Accountants Price Waterhouse, the millionaire outfit which sequestered the South Wales Miners’ Funds. As the newspapers reported, the operation was executed with military precision. It took the team 10 minutes from entering the building to securing themselves behind metal-sheeted doors on the 13th floor.

About 600lbs of equipment, including hammers, drills, saws and timber, were carried past the startled staff. Lifts were occupied and protests ignored. All the keys were lifted from the security guards desk. Everyone knew his task and skilfully completed it.

Not that everything was perfect. The security guard managed to regain entry to the foyer before all the equipment had been moved in. The elevators were too small to easily accommodate the 8' x 4' metal sheeting. An officer had to be ejected from Price Waterhouse as the occupation got under-way. It proved impossible to commandeer all three lifts for the 13th floor and so that area came under police control sooner than planned. An early casualty was the driver who was arrested at the Hire Depot as he was returning the van which the team arrived in.

In spite of these reverses the operation was a complete success. Fire doors leading to the common stairway were nailed-up. The twelve had captured the offices of Price Waterhouse and were securely barricaded-in. The police who arrived at 7.50 am could only rage, threaten and kick impotently at the steel doors out in the corridor as those inside calmly outlined their reasons for their peaceful occupation.

For this was no exercise in bravado but a serious social act. The anarchists were convinced of the need for direct action against Price Waterhouse. Contrary to popular report, this company did not simply carry out a mundane legal job of sequestration against miners; they entered the fight with all the commitment of partisans. Price Slaughterhouse went much further than their law demanded. Not content with seizing the £350,000 administrative funds belonging to the South Wales miners, they proceeded to grab an additional £400,000 in the Provident fund and money collected for hardship cases, food and clothing for families. To permit these gangsters to

(Federation of Saint Louis): Literary Club of the IAA St. Louis... [et al.] (German, St. Louis, 1883-1890, edited by Joseph Reifgraber, circulation of ~2000) *Der Kämpfer* (German, St. Louis, 1896, edited by Otto Rinke)

Wolfsaugen: ein Blatt für freie Geister (German, St. Louis, 1900-1901?)

Mephisto: ein Blatt für alle und keinen (German, St. Louis, 1901-1902)

Regeneracion (Mexican/Spanish, St. Louis years: 1905-1906) [see <https://archivomagon.net/periodicos/regeneracion-1900-1918/>]

We hope comrades (in Saint Louis or not) find them interesting. ■

Guillamón and the Nebula

We are always learning more about the history of anarchism, but always certain there is much more to know. Even in a double issue we don't have space to print everything that enlightens and intrigues us. We have recently put up two translated articles by Agustín Guillamón which look at affinity groups.

The first looks at the connections of Ángel Carballeira Rego and the group around the underground anarchist paper *Alerta!* in discussion with Carballeira Rego's son:

'The notion of a "nebula" model binding together these affinity groups is something unearthed by Ángel Carballeira Mombrió in his response to my questionnaire, something that we need to digest and circulate, because it offers an apt and highly original anarchist organizational model that is often misconstrued and which differs entirely from the syndicalist model and is entirely opposed to the Leninist and/or militaristic model.

'We need to bear it in mind that this "nebula" model, viewed from the outside, was wrapped in a dense cloud that screened off what was happening inside it, not to mention who was on the inside and what he was doing. Viewed from the inside, that nebula represented a sealed off world of tried and tested militants, a sea of opportunities and a network of social and personal relationships that encouraged the emergence of affinity groups that came together in order to tackle specific tasks (from bomb-making, planning actions or strikes, setting up a cooperative, supporting a rationalist school or ateneo through to the setting up, writing, printing and distribution of a newspaper or leaflet and the widest spectrum of activities which, once mounted, entailed the break-up of that affinity group).' ('The Affinity Group That Published the Underground Anarchist Paper, Alerta!' (<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/z614s0>).

Its companion piece is 'Distinguishing Between Defence Groups, Affinity Groups and Action Groups' (<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/h44kvv>):

'The characteristic features of the affinity groups

were that they were transitory, self-financing, decentralized, autonomous and federalist. Clandestine circumstance as well as their own inclinations meant that these groups came together to mount some specific action or given task, after which they would break up following a brief existence. Some of the same individuals might meet up again in other affinity groups with an eye to some specific undertaking. This ongoing volatility and clandestinity was a product of the requisite adaptation to unrelenting police crackdowns as well as anarchist suspicion of any organizational structure, something that makes historical investigation of them very tricky. Even though there was the odd longer-lived affinity group, they were the exceptions. Normally they were made up of no less than four and no more than twenty comrades, so much so that once they grew to more than twenty members they would split into two separate groups.'

We warmly encourage you to read both. ■

To The Miners

Is the miner a man... or a mole, that tunnels deep down in the earth?

Blind as a mole, is he, to all that makes life's worth? Is his heart as black as his face? Is his life his own or yours,

Ye men who grow fat on his toil, on the coal, that he hews as his sweat downpours?

As you sit by your snug fireside, and you ring the bell for the maid,

Lest the coal soil your hands, just the slightest bit, ... Keep them white, for the wage you have paid.

And what more should the workers ask, than existence he's scarce e'en a right to?

Aye, and whenever your greed makes war, he must throw down his tools and fight, too!

As you warm yourselves by the fire, and your profits and belly grow big,

The miner grovels belly-long, your wealth from the pit to dig.

Up to his knees in muck and wet, cut off from the light of day,

What right has he to a higher wage, who is made of a lower clay?

Well, may be his SKIN may get black as hell, whilst your dividends he doth dig,

But is it the miner, or coal-owner, that lives most like a pig?

He who gets his bread by the sweat of his brow, and the might of his own strong hand,

Or the royalty owner, whose title is that his forefathers STOLE the land?

They prate of 'honest toil' but how much have they ever done,

Who live upon the worker's back from father unto son?

The miner is grimed from head to foot, but I think his

the day before. The next day MacQueen surrendered himself to the police to begin his five year sentence. He certainly did not have to come back but seems to have returned to save the person who paid his bail bond, Philip Geyer, father of MacQueen's counsel Robert Geyer. Indeed, there is some suggestion that Robert Geyer went to Leeds to talk to MacQueen about the situation. MacQueen spent some of his last day of freedom in New York with Robert Geyer and then the cell doors closed.

'More publicity as a prisoner'

That wasn't the end of the story though. Within the next two years MacQueen would gain more publicity as a prisoner than any time as a free man. His case, for reasons that are not too clear, was taken up by Alfred W. Wishart, a Minister of the Central Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey. In 1905 Wishart self-published the pamphlet *William MacQueen: Reasons Why He Should Be Liberated*. It is, to say the least, a most puzzling work. One presumes that Wishart was in close contact with MacQueen. He had letters of reference to the court as to MacQueen's character and he portrays MacQueen as a respected trade unionist and a Tolstoyan anarchist who does not believe in violence. The latter thesis is proved, suggests Wishart, when MacQueen refused to speak with Emma Goldman at the 18 June meeting in Paterson and only took the platform when he heard she wasn't coming.

This pamphlet offers years of puzzlement to historians of anarchism. A few points might be mentioned here. MacQueen's writings certainly supported all types of pathways that would lead to the Revolution and thus were worth walking on. He does not appear too Tolstoyan in any way when you read them. Indeed, there is a staunch atheism in the pamphlets he chose to publish. He saw the union as an important pathway to the Revolution and spoke at many union meetings and sometimes was physically attacked but he and Grossman were viewed, after their arrests, with some suspicion as anarchists by the Central Federated Union, who after some discussion did support them. It would certainly be wise to disassociate oneself from Emma Goldman who at this time was a controversial figure in the national press, but the narrative presented by Wishart does not stand up. In *Living My Life* (p. 328) Goldman writes of William MacQueen visiting her and asking her to speak at the 18 June meeting in Paterson. She knew MacQueen from her visits to England where he had arranged a meeting in Leeds for her and he obviously felt he knew her well enough to ask her to speak. She initially accepted but after a brutal nightmare that featured Leon Czolgosz, she lost her nerve and wired MacQueen to say she could not come. We should understand that Goldman's brutal treatment at the hands of the police and press after the assassination of McKinley had left her considerably traumatized.

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She did however speak at a New York meeting to discuss Paterson on 18 November 1902. One of the speakers that night was apparently Nellie, MacQueen's wife. The only reason she would have been at the June 18 meeting was because MacQueen asked her to come and speak there!

We could go on breaking down this attempt to portray McQueen as a Tolstoyan upright pillar of the community but a worrying thought won't go away. Where was Wishart getting this information from? Some of it may have been inferred by the odd piece of writing but one can't help feeling that some of this information had come from MacQueen himself and that this was a joint narrative.[8] This assertion takes on new life when MacQueen's case was taken up by the well-known English writer H.G. Wells. MacQueen is interviewed for Wells' book *The Future In America: A Search After Realities* published by George Bell and Sons, London in 1908. The interview appears to have taken place in late 1906 or early 1907. In the book several of Wishart's claims are repeated. MacQueen is respectable, a correspondent with William Morris and an anarchist of the Christian, Tolstoyan school who declined to speak on the same platform as that evil Emma Goldman. Luigi Galleani who preached 'blind violence' (246) had got off scot-free. The latter is true in the sense that Galleani had been acquitted of all charges, thanks to a hung jury on his return to Paterson in 1907. Presumably Wells had read Wishart's pamphlet but also gained information through his interview with MacQueen in Trenton jail.

There is still the question of how Wells learnt about MacQueen's case. One supposition is that Wishart provided him some of the necessary information. The Wells archive in Champagne, Illinois has a letter to Wells from MacQueen and Nellie dated 24th October 1906 and there are other letters after the publication of the book. An announcement in *Freedom* of June 1907 mentions that MacQueen had been released (he was pardoned after serving three years for sedition with the malicious mischief charge not being proved). Sadly he had contracted tuberculosis during his jail time. His return to England occasioned little or no fanfare in the anarchist press and the disease killed him in November 1908. The 8 December 1908 *Freedom* published MacQueen's obituary. It was hardly a fulsome one after the amount of work he had done for anarchism.

'Any road that might take him towards anarchy'

MacQueen is one of many anarchists who died young and never saw his full potential realized. If nothing else writing a little about him reflects a determination that at the very least he will not be forgotten. There's something else, though. Often, we raid the anarchist past in the light of the anarchist present. Some of us may see him as a walking

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contradiction as we look for purity of theory and practice. The truth is, I sense, that for MacQueen the pursuit of anarchy was urgent and necessary. That pursuit, in his case, took the form of passionate and fiery speeches (in the most oppressive situations he chose attack, rather than defense), impulsive, sustained actions and thoughtful and inclusive writing. Action wasn't careful and rational. It was messy, sometimes self-defeating and sometimes wonderfully exciting. All he had to guide him at each step was a steadfastness of morality and purpose. Any road that might take him towards anarchy was worth walking on and he appears to have had little of the rigidity and theoretical certainty that was a feature of the writings and practice of some other comrades of this period. On a more somber note, we cannot begin to know what he went through in prison, or when he became conscious of the disease that was killing him. We can only sense his love for his partner and children and his desire to see them instead of dying in jail. Under that emotional pressure he appears to have cracked. He wasn't the first and he won't be the last. His life was no marginal one in the pursuit of the ideal and it should be celebrated, even if the ending was not what we might have wanted it to be.

I wrote at the beginning of this piece that anarchist newspapers can flatter to deceive. In the case of Billy MacQueen that is achingly so. We can find his traces and even draw on some of his beliefs and actions, but I would argue that we need to be wary of assuming too much. What we can say with some certainty is that his life as an anarchist touches always on the critical question that has always underscored anarchist struggle; how to defeat the sinewy and brutal beast that is capitalism before it occasions even more hurt. For a time, his life explored that challenge and offered possibilities to overcome it.

Barry Pateman [an update of 'Free Commune and Billy MacQueen' in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* No. 70-71, July 2012]

Notes

1, There is a fine bio of MacQueen by Nick Heath here: <https://libcom.org/article/macqueen-william-billy-1875-1908>

2, Sometime after 1900 Alf Barton would move far more towards socialism, joining the Independent Labour Party, then the British Socialist Party in 1913. He supported World War One and, after a little time with the Communist party he returned to the Independent Labour Party in the early nineteen twenties. He remained an active trade unionist. In 1922 his book *A World History of the Workers* (Labour Publishing Co.) was released. It is an impressively engaging and studious piece that needs to be resurrected!!

3, *New Order* was edited by J.C. Kenworthy a

prominent Tolstoyan Christian anarchist who had visited Tolstoy in 1895. MacQueen had met Kenworthy in Leeds in 1897 and in an article in the November 1898 *Freedom* he stresses the strong influence of Kenworthy on the creation of the Brotherhood Workshop. (6 Victoria Road, Holbeck, Leeds)

4, The massacre of strikers protesting the cost of food in Milan 6-10 May 1898 became known as the Bava Beccaris massacre after the name of the General who organized the brutal response to the strikers and demonstrators.

5, Other articles of note are 'Socialism and Politics' by Barton and an interesting piece 'A Dream?' by E. Kelly which features an anarchist speaker being attacked by those he is urging to break their chains. It is an eerie foreshadowing of what would happen in a few months to those anarchist speakers who opposed the Second Boer War – including MacQueen himself.

6, The Newsletter was printed by the Leeds Anarchist Press Committee and all communications were to be sent to W. MacQueen.

7, In his pamphlet *William MacQueen: Reasons Why He Should Be Released* (1905) Alfred Wishart suggests MacQueen left America in April 1903.

8, This assertion is also given credence by Wishart's appearance before the Board of Pardons in January 1907 to present papers suggesting that MacQueen wasn't an anarchist. One has to presume that he did this with MacQueen's permission. ■

Remembering Roy Emery

We're sad to pass on news of the death of our comrade Roy Emery. Roy was a good friend to the KSL, as well a long-term supporter of *Black Flag* and member of the Direct Action Movement and then SolFed. Our comrade MH paid him this tribute: 'I remember Roy as someone who would stand up for his beliefs. He was dogged in his support of others trying to organise, whether nationally or locally. I can remember pieces Albert pulled together in *Black Flag* bemoaning the new age hokery in Glastonbury and knew that Roy was the source. That he only had a couple of comrades around him, including his partner Jan, makes his long-standing militancy in a small country town all the more admirable.'

We send our condolences to Roy's family, friends and comrades.

[Update, 17 April 2023] 'Scoeman' on Twitter added this tribute:

'Roy was the first anarchist I knew, as a Bath schoolboy in the 60's. A handful of us would meet, discuss and collect copies of *Freedom* and *Anarchy*. Like many anarchists at the time, I think Roy theoretically was a pacifist, but the fieriest one I've ever met. RIP comrade.'

@Scoeman3 ■

p.29.

37, Briefing (see note 36)

38, 'Half a Life of Editing' *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Summer, 1981) p.413

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27543876> A longer and less accurate account appeared in Woodcock's memoir *Letter to the Past* in 1982.

39, David Goodway 'Freedom, 1886–2014: an Appreciation' *History Workshop Journal*, v79, Issue 1, (Spring 2015), p.233–242,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbv001>

40, Ray p.77

41, Cope p.63

42, Cope p.59

43, Sharon Roughan, Ame Harper, and Judy Greenway "I didn't know I was the child of unusual parents": Tom Keell Wolfe interview notes', <http://www.judygreenway.org.uk/wp/i-didnt-know-i-was-the-child-of-unusual-parents-tom-keell-wolfe-interview-notes/> [Her shop was Sunshine Health Stores in Stroud: KSL].

44, Cope p.61

45, Ray p.72

46, Vernon Richards 'Remembering Lilian, 1875-1974' *Freedom* (11 May 1974), reprinted in *The Raven* no.21. <https://libcom.org/article/raven-21-feminism-anarchism-women>

47, Cope p.57

48, Cope p.61

49, Cope p.62

50, 'Anarchist Jailed [Tom W. Brown]' *War Commentary for Anarchism* (October 1944) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2bvrsb>

51, Cope p.68

52, Ray p.119

53, Phil Ruff 'The Invisible Dictatorship [a short history of *Anarchy* magazine (second series)]' *KSL Bulletin* no.97-98, (February 2019) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/pc87wq>

54, Cope p.86

55,

<https://www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk/pdf/Radical-bookshops-Listing.pdf>

56, <https://www.urban75.net/forums/threads/what-magazine-paper-periodical-most-shaped-your-political-thinking.355346/> ■

Anarchism: Arguments for and against [2023, review]

'Most political reformers have some part of the unfree system they wish to abolish. Republicans would abolish the Monarchy, Secularists would abolish or disestablish the Church; Socialists would, or used to want to, abolish the apparatus of exploitation; Pacifists would abolish the Army. Anarchism is unique in wishing to abolish all. The only true definition of an Anarchist is one who

believes it is desirable to abolish all; who believes it possible to abolish all, the sooner the better; and who works to bring such abolition about.' [p.42-3]

Albert Meltzer spent his whole life working in the anarchist movement, and arguing for anarchism in books, papers, pamphlets and in person. This book, when first published, drew on 45 years of activism: 'First published in 1981, *Anarchism: Arguments for and against* is the most reprinted of Albert's writings. Albert's first written response to an objector came in *War Commentary* in May 1944. The roots of this text lie in his 1968 pamphlet *Aims and principles of Anarchism: an essay at defining what the Anarchist Movement is and how wide a field it covers*, the book he co-wrote with Stuart Christie *The Floodgates of Anarchy* (published in 1970) and a series of articles on 'objections to Anarchism' in *Black Flag* in the early seventies.' [p.3, KSL intro]

This is a reprint of the final version published after Albert's death. Thankfully, Active were able to get hold of those files. This edition has no contents page and I miss the cartoons from earlier ones. But it is ridiculously cheap, so there's no financial obstacle to reading it. The cover shows Albert pecking away at a manual typewriter, but the text feels painfully up to date:

'It may be that in some technological society of the future, run by the State, in a sort of boss utopia, the working class will be displaced as a productive class.' Reduced ... 'to turners of switches and openers of the scientists' doors; to secretaries and receptionists; to janitors and clerks; to domestic servants of the rich. Anarcho-syndicalists think such a society must be resisted.' [p.59-60] It's good to have this classic back in print.

Anarchism: Arguments for and against by Albert Meltzer. Active Distribution, 2023. £2 ISBN 9781914567223 <https://www.activedistributionshop.org/shop/pamphlets-booklets/5434-anarchism-arguments-for-and-against-a6.html> ■

Papers from Saint Louis

We have just posted some issues of anarchist newspapers published in Saint Louis (or nearby).

Der Anarchist

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/7h466j> (one partial issue, from the Labadie collection) and *La Rivolta* <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/x3fhgz> (six issues, from the papers of Ugo Fedeli at the IISG in Amsterdam).

They come from 'a project to find, digitize, and hopefully translate anarchist newspapers that spiked in St. Louis (as they did elsewhere in the U.S.) 100+ years ago.' The project also identified other St. Louis-based anarchist publications (from roughly 1880-1920), that they never dug up: *Die Parole*: International Working Men's Association

More digging

Cope would like to hear from people who have worked in anarchist bookshops, or who could help ‘produce a comprehensive listing of anarchist magazines, publishers and books’.[54] The Kate Sharpley Library will try and let him know of anarchist bookshops that don’t appear in his ‘Radical Bookshops Listing’.[55] Does anyone know the names of shops we should pass on? I wonder if British anarchists just as likely to work through mail order, or street selling papers, books and pamphlets as starting their own bookshops? There’s a thread (not exclusively anarchist) on ‘What magazine/paper/periodical most shaped your political thinking?’ which has some relevant material on Urban75.[56]

If anyone has memories (or primary sources) about the circulation of anarchist ideas in print they should get in touch. Likewise if you’re already researching how those ideas circulated in the past. There’s always more digging to be done to uncover the complexities of anarchist history.

Notes

- 1, Cope, ‘Anarchist Papers, Publishing and Bookshops: An Introduction’ *Radical Bookselling History Newsletter* no.6, (May 2023) p.49-87. <https://www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk/pdf/Radical-Bookselling-History-Newsletter-Issue-6-May-2023.pdf> and via www.radicalbooksellers.co.uk
- 2, Cope p.86
- 3, Meltzer p.93 ‘Internment and Discernment’
- 4, Albert Meltzer *The Anarchists in London 1935-1955* p.22
- 5, See ‘DISTURBANCES: Anarchist organizations including the Freedom Press Anarchists: history, aims and reports on activities; War Commentry newspaper’ <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C4762053>
- 6, Ray p.66; Cope p.60
- 7, Anyone attempting to understand the 1945 split is encouraged to read the chronology at <http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/page/139511268/The%201945%20split%20in%20British%20anarchism>
- 8, ‘The tyranny of words’ by ‘Sectarian’ *Black Flag* v2, n8 (1 November 1971) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/j9kg11>
- 9, Cope p.49
- 10, Cope p.69
- 11, from ‘Freedom, 1886–2014: an Appreciation’ *History Workshop Journal*, v79, Issue 1, (Spring 2015) p.233-242 <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbv001>
- 12, Cope p.64
- 13, Cope p.70
- 14, Ray p.156
- 15, Cope p. 71
- 16, Meltzer p.174 ‘Half-time summing-up’

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- 17, Meltzer p.376 ‘Looking forward’
- 18, Meltzer p.323 “‘Anarchy””
- 19, ‘Albert Meltzer and the fight for working class history’ *KSL Bulletin* no.76, (October 2013) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/qz62j9>
- 20, ‘Remembering Albert Meltzer 25 years on’ Freedom News website <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2021/05/07/remembering-albert-meltzer-25-years-on/>
- 21, Meltzer p.166 ‘How the Thames was lost’
- 22, See ‘Slaughter or slander? Notes on the Albert Meltzer-George Woodcock conflict’ *KSL Bulletin* no.107-108, (December 2022) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/cjt075>
- 23, See ‘Obituary: F.A. Ridley (1897-1994)’ *Black Flag* no.205 (1994) <https://files.libcom.org/files/blackflag205.pdf>
- 24, See ‘Joe Thomas [obituary]’ *Black Flag* no.198 (May 1990) reprinted in *KSL Bulletin* no.106, (September 2022) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/gmsd1x>
- 25, See ‘Ethel Mannin (1900-1985)’ *KSL Bulletin* no.9, (1997) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/mpg58h>
- 26, Meltzer p.199 ‘The Shadow of the Tong’
- 27, ‘Audrey Beecham [1915-89]’ *Black Flag* no.204 (Spring 1994) Reprinted with notes in *KSL Bulletin* no.106, (September 2022) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/tx97x7>
- 28, ‘Liars and Liberals – the other anarchism. The Woodcock-Sansom school of falsification’ from *Liars and Liberals* (*Black Flag* supplement no.3) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/v9s6q9>
- 29, Phil Ruff ‘Introduction’ Meltzer p.5
- 30, Cope p.49
- 31, Ray p.143
- 32, ‘The Wooden Shoe is on the other foot: examining a myth’ *KSL Bulletin* No. 109, (March 2023). <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/jxsnnt>
The quote is from Anon. ‘How to recapture ‘Freedom’ for the anarchist movement’ *Black Flag* v2, n15, (January 1973).
- 33, see ‘Nicolas Walter Letter on “non-violent fascism”’ *Black Flag* v4, no.3 (August 1975) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/93210v>
- 34, Cope p.61
- 35, Donald Rooum ‘Freedom, Freedom Press and Freedom Bookshop: A short history of Freedom Press’ *Information for Social Change* no.27, (Summer 2008) https://ia802800.us.archive.org/9/items/information_for_social_change/ISC%2027%20Whole%20Issue.pdf and Ray p.71.
- 36, Briefing by London Anarchist Group (LAG) in 1946 for Conference discussing the split. <http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/file/139485351/Conference%20summing%20up%20of%20affairs-LAG.pdf> That the cost was £500 was recorded by Richards in *Freedom: A Hundred Years*

‘Not a good look’? Reading Dave Cope on British anarchist publishing history

Dave Cope is a veteran radical bookseller and part of the Radical Bookselling History group. He has written an article on ‘Anarchist Papers, Publishing and Bookshops’.[1] This is part of his project to write ‘a history of the Radical Book and Book Trade from 1780’[2] in Britain. The article is a synthesis based mainly on reading and comparing two books: Albert Meltzer’s *I Couldn’t Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation* (1996) and Rob Ray’s *A Beautiful Idea: History of the Freedom Press Anarchists* (2018). Cope’s article contains many errors (some of which seem to arise when Cope rewrites his source material). It’s been hard to know how to respond. I worry that errors in print develop a life of their own; but is it possible to make corrections without looking vindictive (or worse, suggesting you don’t make mistakes)? Is it better to get on with your own work? I disagree with some of Cope’s interpretations but there are already some pieces in the KSL bulletin that I think shed some light on them.

Albert, memory and Workers in Uniform

I Couldn’t Paint Golden Angels is a memoir and Albert’s coming to terms with the past. Every memoir depends on hindsight and should be treated as a starting point, to be checked against primary sources, rather than a finished history. For example, Albert refers to *Workers in Uniform* as a wartime bulletin of the Anarchist Federation;[3] in his earlier memoir he described it as ‘a privately circulated bulletin’[4] I think this is possibly Albert’s memory of working on the (untitled) circular letters that Freedom Press issued to members of the armed forces during WW2 (copies are preserved in the National Archives).[5] Ray describes *Workers in Uniform* as a bulletin; in Cope it’s described as a paper.[6] I mention the split of 1945 several times below. Albert’s accounts are always influenced by a certain amount of hindsight: at the time he stood alongside Freedom Press.[7]

Albert, ‘sectarianism’ and conflict

Cope reacts badly to Albert’s self-declared sectarianism. He treats it as a synonym for ‘prejudice’, rather than asking what positive value Albert saw in it:

‘What is wrong with sectarianism? It is the opposites of “catholic” – a movement based on “catholic” principles is authoritarian, because it wishes to include all tendencies but subject them to one discipline and one thought. The Communist Party and the Vatican are typical. But a sectarian lets

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each tendency “gang its ain gait” [go its own way] and contribute to a general aim.’[8]

Cope introduces Albert like this: ‘Meltzer was unapologetically sectarian, scornful of the Freedom tradition in particular, but he was active for over 60 years in the movement, read widely, knew many of the main activists in the different trends and had a sense of history and of the need to record it.’[9] Given that Albert wrote in *Spain and the World, Revolt!, War Commentary* and *Freedom* – this makes me wonder what ‘the Freedom tradition’ is, and who invents it? When did Freedom Press stop being Anarcho-Syndicalist? When did Albert become a critic of Freedom Press?

Later, Cope claims ‘Anarchist publishing’s most damaging feud was the long-standing enmity between Meltzer (1920-1996) and [Vernon/Vero] Richards (1915-2001). Meltzer’s paper *Black Flag* has been described by David Goodway as “cantankerously militant”. This also describes his autobiography, *I Couldn’t Paint Golden Angels*. Meltzer proudly claims he never changed any opinion from the age of 15, which is generally not a good look for anyone interested in politics.’ [...] ‘He was an activist and very well read but not a thinker and despised academics. He dismissed CND and the New Left as “a diversion from the class struggle”. His endlessly repeated outbursts against the Freedom group do not help his cause: “bourgeois-pacifist”, “Failed Mandarins”, etc. just become a bore.’[10]

I have my doubts about much of this. I think that the idea that Albert’s criticism of Freedom Press arose from and amounted to a personal conflict with Vero is a narrative constructed to downplay his political differences with Freedom Press generally (see mention of the Wooden Shoe bookshop below). Cope obviously agrees with Goodway’s verdict[11] but what did people outside the Freedom Press circle make of *Black Flag* at different times? Were Freedom Press ever ‘sectarian’ (in either sense)? Cope doesn’t think so: don’t they claim to be ‘open to all trends’?[12] and ‘We have seen the help Freedom gave to other organisations.’[13] One insight of Ray’s that Cope ignores is that Nicolas Walter’s ‘attempt to disqualify [the Angry Brigade] through definitional pedantry’ [...] ‘went down extremely badly in the wider movement’.[14] Cope mentions various British anarchist papers of the 1970’s and that ‘all were critical of *Freedom*’[15] but neglects to ask why.

Albert the unchanging?

I have not seen any written claim by Albert that ‘he never changed any opinion from the age of 15’. I assume that is Cope’s interpretation of ‘The Anarchism I advocated from the start, and never varied from is that born of the class struggle, which was certainly taken into account by philosophers but came out of the working class. It had a proud fighting

history in the struggle against Statism and every exploitative system.’[16] I would think claiming loyalty to basic principles, or even ‘I never give up’[17] is common in political memoirs.

Albert’s attitudes did change over time, which shows even in his autobiography. He tells of worrying what a workmate and wife would think of his young anarchist comrades: ‘She looked a treat, but I wondered what she would make of her first sight all those scruffy individuals in torn jeans sitting around on the lawn smoking pot, with children and dogs running around them, listening to Jimi Hendrix. To my surprise, she thoroughly enjoyed herself. And it was nice for me to lose a prejudice too. I thought I had none to lose.’[18]

I suspect the problem is not that Albert is ‘not a thinker’ (which makes you wonder how he wrote books and articles) but that he is the wrong *sort* of thinker. ‘Albert Meltzer and the fight for working class history’ pointed out that Albert’s historical writing was ‘punchy, humorous and anecdotal.’[19] I think Albert took on the role of remembering and recording anarchist history that Mat Kavanagh had filled before him. Phil Ruff declared Albert ‘was a perfect example of a working-class intellectual who had never been to university’.[20] To Albert, remembering what people in the movement had told him was far more important than ‘looking up dated reference books, and passing it off as knowledge.’[21]

Who did Albert react badly to?

Albert certainly despised George Woodcock for his lies about Spanish Anarchists.[22] It’s worth noting that Albert and Woodcock were both, for their own reasons, happy to backdate their conflict to the 1940s; yet the documents from the time don’t show any such friction. Albert did react badly to ‘progressive’ intellectuals, whether they claimed to lead the working class or to have reinvented anarchism. Albert had friendships with other working class radicals like Frank Ridley (ILP)[23] and Joe Thomas (council communist).[24] He respected the working class writer Ethel Mannin.[25] Even when he criticised Herbert Read as a liberal, he appreciated that ‘he did put his money where mouth was when his ear was bashed.’[...] which ‘greatly relieved Pa Chin [Ba Jin]’s position.’[26]

Albert was willing to work with people from privileged backgrounds: he wrote a warm tribute to Audrey Beecham of Somerville College, Oxford because she had aided the anarchist resistance to Franco.[27] Albert seemed to react most badly when people from outside the working class, like Nicolas Walter, decided they were best qualified to judge what anarchism is – over the objections of working class anarchists. Albert moved away from Freedom Press from the 1960s onwards as it became increasingly identified with the ideas and concerns of

middle class intellectuals. Not everyone felt as strongly: in 1986 Albert lamented ‘Responses to Freedom Press clique have been described by our friends as “terminally boring” but can we let everything pass?’[28] Yet Albert was not alone in turning away from Freedom Press. The ‘sectarianism’ that Cope laments enabled Albert to connect with younger generations of anarchists: ‘Paradoxically, it was the discovery of class struggle anarchism through the “sectarianism” of Black Flag under Albert’s editorship that convinced so many anarchists of my generation to become active in the movement.’[29]

Ray, Room and the Wooden Shoe

Cope embraces Rob Ray, declaring him ‘a model of fairness’[30], taking his proclaimed neutrality at face value. *A Beautiful Idea* is an attempt to write a balanced history of Freedom Press but I’m not sure Ray is as neutral as he thinks he is. Over time I’ve noticed how *A Beautiful Idea* is a synthesis of previous stories. Ray incorporates stories from Donald Room without checking them against primary sources. For example, Ray repeats the story that the Wooden Shoe Bookshop is the source of the conflict between Albert and Freedom Press, trusting that the story (written forty years after the event) is true while attempting to refine the details.[31].

Room’s story was challenged in ‘The Wooden Shoe is on the other foot: examining a myth’: ‘There never was a plan for the Wooden Shoe to move in with Freedom Press, it was the other way round; and the bookshop closed before Freedom Press moved to Whitechapel in 1968.’ ‘Room’s tale of the conflict as a personal one between Albert and Vero is an attempt to rewrite what happened (from an enthusiastic participant in the conflict). There’s no doubt that Albert criticised Vero but I suspect initially the problem was not Vero’s ideas but his inaction. In 1973 Albert lamented “The weekly ‘Freedom’ was built up by the Anarchist Movement as a whole. It was taken over by the Freedom Press Group (not the same thing as Freedom Press which had existed many years before). The last survivors of this group have let it drift into the hands of a body we can only describe as Non-Violent Fascists.”’[32] The context of Albert’s invention of ‘Non-Violent Fascism’ (for ‘non-violent’ authoritarianism) can be seen in his exchange with Nicolas Walter in 1975. [33]

On other occasions, Ray includes Room’s stories without indicating their origin. So, Cope’s account of the purchase of Express Printers repeats[34] Room’s story that ‘another printer lent money on condition of keeping the Hebrew type’. Room recounts this story in 2008; it appears nowhere else until Ray repeats it.[35] Contemporary records give this breakdown of where the money came from: ‘Members of the present Freedom Press Group raised

26% [of the cost]; [VR crossed out] FP by mean of [‘a private’ crossed out] loans raised from sympathisers raised 55%; The Comrades of the Anarchist Federation raised 15%; Comrades not in AF or FP Groups raised 4%’[36] Maybe this is another instance where there might be more details in the Freedom Press or Vernon Richards Papers at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam?

Legends of the Split

Following the split of 1945 Vernon Richards and Marie Louise Berneri were confronted at home, at gunpoint, on the 30th of January 1946 by Tom Brown, Ken Hawkes, Bill Borland and Tom Reilly who demanded money to start a new anarchist publication. They were given a cheque for £25 ‘after considerable discussion’. The cheque ‘was presented on Friday afternoon, February 1st. 1946, by Bill Borland, who endorsed it. Borland was photographed as he left the bank by comrades who were indignant at the incident of Wednesday morning, and were determined no denials should be possible.’ This is described in the summation of what happened, produced by the London Anarchist Group for a conference of all sides in the split, held on 30th of March 1946.[37]

It seems not to have been mentioned again until Woodcock wrote that opponents of Freedom Press ‘extorted money at gunpoint from two members of our group whose apartment they raided.’[38] In 2015 David Goodway reported that ‘Cliff Holden, a former member of the War Commentary collective who was to become a painter as David Bomberg’s pupil at the famous Borough Polytechnic class, tells me how he marched Berneri with a pistol in her back to withdraw money from the bank.’[39] Holden dramatised the split, inserting himself into it in the most dramatic fashion. The contemporary sources show Holden was not there, so could not have been one of those who held a gun, and no-one was marched to the bank.

In 2018 Rob Ray’s account is even more dramatic. ‘The tales about what happened next are varied, but David Goodway managed to track down a definitive member of the four, Cliff Holden, who recounted that he was the one who put a pistol to the back of Berneri’s head and marched her to the bank’.[40] Cope says ‘It appears that a group of them forced Berneri to go to the bank – one putting a gun to her head – and give them £25’.[41] By this point, though Holden is not mentioned, Ray’s story about a gun being put to Berneri’s head is repeated as true. No contemporary documents or memories report a gun being put to anyone’s back or head. A story evolves and is presented as ‘history’.

Lilian Wolfe

Wolfe was a major figure in the history of Freedom

Press. Cope speculates that she ‘presumably’ sold anarchist literature at her health food shop.[42] I have found no evidence for this beyond one comment from her son: ‘Q. What did she sell in her shop? As well as food – literature? T. Not much in the way of literature. She also sold herbs...’[43] Which doesn’t strike me as a cast-iron confirmation.

Cope also claims that Wolfe was a paid worker for Freedom Press: ‘The increase in printing business enabled the group to offer a wage to Lilian Wolfe to manage the Press.’[44] this expands on *A Beautiful Idea* where Wolfe gave up ‘her main income running a shop in Stroud to become a full-time administrator for the Press’.[45] The obituary Vero wrote for Wolfe shows that she was not paid: ‘when we tried to discuss money matters with her, we were cut short by her assuring us that there was no problem. With her pension she could manage, adding “I have budgeted to live until I am 80!” [...] For her, freedom was time, and the smaller her material demands the less time would she have to spend making the money to buy those things and the more time to do the things she wanted to do – including working for no money!’[46]

Some other errors

Cope’s account of syndicalism manages to ignore its origins in France; make it identical to anarcho-syndicalism and credit it to the revolutionary industrial unionists of the IWW.[47]

He quotes Ray that *War Commentary* was “‘sold in just three bookshops” – unfortunately not named (Flynn’s Bomb Shop in Bristol, Collets, and the ILP’s Socialist Bookshop would be my guess’.[48] *War Commentary* April 1940 identifies the shops as the Socialist Bookshop [ILP], 235 St Brides Street [London E.C.], Collets [London W.C.] and the Anarchist Bookshop, 127 George Street, Glasgow.

Cope says that Tom Brown is arrested ‘for distributing seditious leaflets’.[49] This is actually ‘Tom W. Brown (not to be confused with Tom Brown, the author of *Trade Unionism or Syndicalism* and *The British General Strike*)’.[50]

His account of the second series of *Anarchy* is inaccurate: ‘A new series of *Anarchy* was set up under Phil Ruff in 1972. This became an independent production, moved closer to ‘class struggle’ anarchism but returned to the Freedom fold briefly in the 1980s.’[51] The second series of *Anarchy* began in 1971, was edited by a collective which Phil Ruff joined later. ‘Returned to the fold’ is a misunderstanding of Ray’s description of them ‘working out of Angel Alley’[52] – Phil remembered ‘we received correspondence via a post box at Freedom Press, but absolutely no other assistance from them. And eventually we were told by *Freedom* to go elsewhere and please never darken their doors again.’[53]